

The Father Heart of God



By John Dawson

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One of the most wonderful revelations of the Bible is that God is our Father. What do you think of when you hear the word "father"? Do you automatically think of protection, provision, warmth, and tenderness? Or does the word "father" paint different kinds of pictures for you?

God reveals Himself in the Bible as a gentle, forgiving Father, intimately involved with each and every detail of our lives. It is not only a beautiful picture, but a true one. However, every person seems to have a different idea of what God is like, because they unconsciously tend to attach the feelings and impressions that they have of their own earthly father to their concept of their Heavenly Father. Each person's own experience with human authority is usually transferred over to how they relate to God. Good experiences bring us closer to knowing and understanding God, just as bad experiences create distorted pictures of our Father's love for us.

What did God have in mind when He created the family? The Bible says, *"God makes a home for the lonely (Psalm 68:6 NASB)* A family involves a circle of relationship including an adult male and female, into which tiny, dependent human beings are born and raised.

Why do we enter the world as such helpless, inadequate persons, and then slowly grow up physically, mentally, and emotionally into self-sufficient adults? Have you ever wondered why God didn't come up with some sort of reproduction system that would produce a physically completed person such as His original creation of Adam and Eve?

I believe God wanted us to come into this world totally dependent and helpless, because He intends the family unit to be a place where His love is demonstrated to both parent and child. As parents we begin to

really understand God's heart towards us as **His** children. And as children, it is God's will for us to see His love revealed through parental tenderness, mercy, and discipline.

But what if the ideal did not happen? What if you have been failed in some way by parental authority? So many have suffered hurt and rejection by their families that it is hard for them to see God as He really is. Understanding the character of God is essential if we are to love Him, serve Him, and **be like Him**

I want to talk about six different areas of misconception concerning God and His love for us. For ease of communication I will be referring almost exclusively to God's qualities of fatherhood. However, a full revelation of God's parental love is incomplete without the presence of the male and female attributes of parental affection. *"And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* (Genesis 1:27 NASB) I want you to look back into your personal past and see if your relationship with God has been hindered in any way because of a failure or absence of tender loving care from one or both of your parents.

I. Parental Authority

Have you ever turned into the driveway of a friend's house to be greeted by the family dog? The foolish mutt will either cower away from you, trembling with fear, or leap upon you with an unwanted display of affection, demonstrated with tongue, tail, and dirty paws. The browbeaten puppy that cannot be induced to trust you has obviously been mistreated. The exuberant mongrel attempting to give you a facial with his tongue has obviously come from a loving home.

So it is when God approaches man. Our past experiences dictate our response when God reaches out to us. A weeping prophet named Hosea heard the voice of God saying, *"When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from Me. They sacrificed to the baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them."* (Hosea 11:1-4 LB) God's authority is not harsh and vindictive, but to the contrary, He is unspeakably gentle and long-suffering.

The other day I rushed into my den urgently needing some information from my files. As I sorted frantically through my papers, my five-year-old son repeatedly blew his shrill tin whistle. I told him again and again to stop. There was a period of silence followed by a deafening blast right next to my ear, including a spray of saliva. I reached around, swatted him with the back of my hand and bellowed at him in anger. Immediately I felt that the Spirit of God had been grieved. I remembered the biblical statement that God is slow to anger and delights to be merciful. I took my son in my arms and asked him to forgive me. It was only right that I should correct his disobedience, but our children should always know that we discipline them because we love them, and not because we are venting our momentary frustration.

Our Heavenly Father is at this very moment being slandered and misrepresented all over the world by man's cruelty and selfishness. Not only in the home, but in all forms of human government. His laws of love have been ignored and our mangled hearts continue on in carrying out injustice to all those smaller and weaker than ourselves.

What horror is God seeing at this moment? A bedroom door bursts open. A small boy is slapped awake by a drunken and angry man in the middle of the night "The sprinklers are still on. It's a flood. I'll teach you, boy!" The terrified child is beaten mercilessly by the dark, hulking shape of a man he calls "Daddy."

A 15-year-old prostitute with blank, empty eyes, mechanically performs through a night of degradation on Hollywood Boulevard. She doesn't care what happens to her. She hasn't felt clean since the night she was molested by her own father.

A wounded generation stumbles through their youthful years, only to visit the same hurts on their own children. Generation after generation it goes on. Is there no one to comfort us? Who will father the children of men? Whose arms are big enough for all the lonely children of the world? Who weeps over our pains? Who will comfort us in our loneliness? ONLY GOD. A BROKEN-HEARTED FATHER who is rejected by the little ones He yearns to heal. Our problem is that we, like the browbeaten puppy, shrink away from the One who we assume will be like the other authorities in our lives. But He is not He is perfect love. It was God who gave this command to parents in Ephesians 6:4: *"Parents don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord Himself approves."*(LB)

II. Parental Faithfulness

Every promise of God will be fulfilled. He is consistently loving. His one heart motive remains the same through time and eternity. He never changes. He only desires to show love and forgiveness.

Do you distrust God? Our distrust hurts Him deeply. What if I came home to my wife and children after a long journey and they ran away from me when I opened the door and called their names. I would be terribly hurt.

You are God's child and even now He calls your name, but maybe deep in your heart you doubt His faithfulness. As a child you may have experienced the complete absence of a father because of death or divorce. Maybe you were orphaned by the demands of your parents' career? Or is it just the childhood memory of broken promises or neglect that haunts you? Some of you screamed for hours as babies but nobody came to relieve you of your discomfort and hunger. Some of you whimpered behind locked doors, a small child, forgotten and alone.

Do you have an inability to sense His presence with you? Is your heart soft towards God or hardened with cynicism and distrust? Look up into His eyes and see His love for you. *"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you... I am with you always even until the end of the age."*(Heb. 13:5; Matt.28:20 NASB)

You may say to me, "But if He has loved me so much, then why haven't I felt Him or seen Him?" It isn't God who has failed you my friend, but I and those who know His love personally. Too many times we have failed to become His voice and His hands to those who do not know Him. Far too few allow themselves to be driven by the broken heart of Jesus into the dark corners of this world where the poor and needy wait Jesus is not attracted to pleasant places, but to hurting people. He pursues us with His love from our first breathing moment until the day we die.

Your Heavenly Father was there when you first walked as a child. He was there through hurts and disappointments. He is present now at this moment. You were briefly loaned to human parents who, for a few years, were supposed to have

showered you with love like His love. But you are and always will be a child of God, made in His image. Your loving Father awaits even now with outstretched arms. What would keep you from Him?

Few people know God in all His loveliness while living this brief life. Many of us are like the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus. Outwardly he saw a bloody, disfigured body, but soon he began to perceive the true nature of Jesus, and at the last minute, entered by faith into the family of God. We too must see past the religious and commercial mutations of Jesus, and behold the God of Love who still stands with open arms saying, *"I came that you might have life and that more abundantly."* (John 10:10 NASB)

"Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, He remains faithful to us who are part of Himself and He will always carry out His promises to us." (11 Tim.2:13 LB)

III. Parental Generosity

A few years ago I stood in a native village in the South Pacific, watching the children play. It occurred to me that these children would very seldom hear the words, "Don't touch that! Leave it alone! Be careful!" Their homes were simple, consisting of earth floors, thatched roofs, and mats that rolled down to serve as walls at night.

In contrast, our modern homes are stuffed with expensive and fragile furnishings and appliances that represent a minefield of potential rejection and rebuke for inquisitive toddlers. How many mothers have exploded in anger at a child who has damaged a treasured object of great expense or sentimental value. Children are constantly reminded of the importance of things - their value, and how to care for them. Very few times do they hear the simple words, "I love **you**."

A repetitious and destructive chant is working its way into the subconscious minds of our children, **"Things** are more important than **me**. **Things** are more important than **me**!" What are we to do? Abandon our modern homes? Obviously not. But we do need to realize that our concept of God's generosity may have been crippled by our childhood experiences.

The truth is that God is innately generous. Creation shows an extravagance of color, complexity, and design that goes far beyond simple functional value. At this moment, high in the Italian Alps, a tiny white flower glistens in the sunlight. It has never been seen by the human eye in all of its seasons of bloom. It is not an essential part of the food chain. It was created by God in the hope that one day a son of Adam or a daughter of Eve might glance at it and be blessed by its beauty.

The greatest demonstration of God's father heart seems to come with His attention to the details of our life. He surprises us with those extra things, those little pleasures and treasures that only a father would know we yearn for. God is not stingy, possessive, or materialistic. We use people to get things, He uses things to bless people.

My family and I have worked as missionaries since 1972, trusting God for our daily needs. Our testimony is that in providing for us, God goes far beyond our basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. We serve a truly generous God! The Psalmist said, *"Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it."* (Psalm 37:3-5 NASB)

IV. Parental Affection

Do you have any idea how attractive you are to God? One of the biggest hindrances to our walk with Him is a sense that our flesh is repulsive to Him because of sin. When my small son is covered with mud from the back yard, I pick him up and clean him off with the garden hose. I reject the mud, **not the boy**. Yes, you have sinned. Yes, you have broken God's heart. But you are still the center of God's affections - the apple of His eye. It is **He** who pursues **us** with a forgiving heart. We say, "I found the Lord," but the truth is, He found us.

Many children, particularly boys, have had no physical display of affection from their fathers, or no real compassion when they are hurt. Because of our false concept of masculinity, we are told, "Don't cry son, boys don't cry." Jesus is not like that. His compassion and understanding are measureless. He feels our hurts more deeply than we do because His sensitivity to suffering is so much greater.

I once had to hold my screaming two-year-old while a doctor stitched a large gash in his forehead. He quickly forgot his painful experience and fell asleep in my arms. But I was tormented by the experience and grieved for hours. You have forgotten most of your pains, but God has not. He has perfect recall of every moment of your life. Your tears are still mingled with His at this very moment

God was there when you experienced cruel teasing in the school yard and you walked alone avoiding the eyes of others. When you sat in a math class confused and dejected, He was with you. At the age of four when you got lost at the county fair and wandered terrified through the huge crowd, it was God who turned the heart of that kind lady who helped you find your mother. *"I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love."* (Hosea 11:4 NIV)

Sometimes we don't understand what a fussy, doting Father God is. Your parents may proudly display bronzed baby booties on the mantle, pictures in an album, or trophies on the wall - but how does that compare with God's infinite capacity to be overjoyed with your every success? It was actually God who heard you speak your first real word. The hours you spent alone exploring new textures with baby hands were a delight to your Heavenly Father. Some of His greatest treasures are the memories of your childhood laughter. There has never been another child like you, and there never will be.

Moses once invoked a blessing on each of the tribes of Israel. To one tribe he said, *"You shall dwell between the shoulders of God."* What a fantastic blessing! But that is where **you** dwell also. Whatever you become in the eyes of men, even a person of great authority, fame, or title, you will never cease to be more or less than a babe in the arms of God.

V. Parental Attentiveness

There is one attribute of God that not even the best parent can hope to imitate - that is God's ability to be with you all the time. As parents we just cannot give constant attention 24 hours a day. We are finite beings who can only focus on one thing at a time. Not only is God with you all the time, but He gives you His whole attention. *"Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is **always** thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you."* (1 Peter 5:7 LB)

God is constantly thinking an uninterrupted stream of loving thoughts toward you as though nobody else in the world exists. You say, "How does He do that? How can He be personally involved with billions of individuals at the same time?" I don't know, but I know it's no problem for the Creator of the world. Perhaps the explanation is the speed of His thought. There are 5 billion people on this planet. God has created things in nature that pulsate at incredible speed. I have heard that the quartz crystal's molecular structure vibrates at the speed of 9 billion movements per second. If God could only think that fast, He could think a loving thought towards you about twice every second without straining His ability to relate to the rest of His children. Who knows how He does it? Just enjoy it! As far as you are concerned, it's just you and God. You don't have to **get** His attention, He's already listening. Don't worry about taking His time... it's all yours.

Your parents were often preoccupied with their activities, and sometimes showed no vital interest in the small events of your life, but God is not that way. He cares. He is a God of detail. Why does the Bible say that God has numbered the hairs of your head? Not because God is concerned with abstract mathematics. He's not a computer wanting data, it's just that He's trying to tell us in what detail He knows us and cares about our lives.

A little boy has worked all afternoon pounding nails into pieces of scrap wood. He finally emerges from the garage and shows a three-level battleship to mom. He can't wait until dad gets home. Dad is late. At 6:30 a tired, preoccupied man finally arrives. A cold dinner is waiting, and so are the income tax forms. The excited boy proudly displays his handiwork to a daddy who barely looks up from the calculator. Daddy never looked, never appreciated, but God did. Father God **always** looked, **always** took delight in the work of your hands. He's your real Father, always will be. Don't ever resent the failings of your human parents. They are just kids that grew up and had kids. Rather rejoice in the wonderful love of your Father God.

VI. Parental Acceptance

We live in a performance-oriented society. Acceptance is always conditional - *if* you make the football team, *if* you bring home a good report card, *if* you look pretty, *if* you have money, *if* you win. The kingdom of this world is a kingdom of rejection. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of unconditional love. God's promises are conditional, we must obey Him to see blessing, but His love is unconditional. You don't have to wait to experience the love of God. Come as you are. Just be honest with Him about your sin - He delights to forgive you. Even in the depths of your past rebellion He still loved you. Even God's judgments are motivated by love.

Many of you have an inability to receive God's love and approval. You are trapped in a slave-like relationship with the harsh god of your imagination. A true love relationship involves the giving and receiving of love responses. There's one night I will always remember - the night I proposed to my wife, Julie. I kissed her and asked her to marry me. What if she had responded like this, "I'll wash your socks, I'll clean your car, and I'll type your letters." I didn't want to hear that! I wanted a response that matched my feelings of love for her. I wanted to know that she felt the same way about me.

What is your response to God when He simply says He loves you? Can you *"Be still and know that He is God"* without rushing into frantic activity to earn His approval? (*Psalm 46:10 KJV*) One of the greatest pictures of human peace and contentment is that of a baby asleep in the arms of a mother after having been fed at the breast. The child no longer squirms and demands, but rests in the embrace of loving arms. A deep mellow contentment wells up into the sound of a lullaby sung by mothers at times like this. The prophet Zephaniah described a similar emotion in the heart of God. *"He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing."* (*Zeph. 3:17 KJV*)

Don't be so restless in the presence of God. Corrie ten Boom had some simple advice to offer this generation. She who experienced so much suffering at the hands of the Nazis, yet went on to great spiritual victory, once said to my friends and me, "Don't wrestle... *nestle*." What a profound but simple truth.

God **already** loves you. All through life you have had to perform and compete. Even as a tiny baby you were compared with other babies. People said you were "too fat," or "too thin," or had "his legs" or "her nose," but God delighted in your uniqueness and still does. It's when you bask in the love of the Father that you cause God to *"rest in His love and joy over you with singing."*

Yes, there is much to be done in your life and through your life. There will be days when God comes bringing deep conviction of sin, showing you areas of your life that need to be changed, committed and submitted to Him. But God is not always demanding changes. He knows our limits and He gives us the grace and power to do the things He asks of us. He is tender and compassionate. Most of the time He just says, "I love you," and softly speaks your name.

Conclusion

If you see that you have been hindered in your relationship with God due to some kind of failure of parental love, then take these things to the Lord. You must find forgiveness in your heart towards anyone who has hurt you. If you don't, your bitterness will consume you and you will find no peace with God. Realize, too, that you are not alone. I haven't met a perfect person yet, or a parent who hasn't made mistakes. Everyone has suffered some kind of hurts in their life. One of the keys for release is found in forgiveness. The important thing is that you go forward and get to know God for who He really is - not who you **think** He is. He is the Perfect Parent. He always disciplines in love. He is faithful, generous, kind, and just He loves you and He longs to spend time with you. He wants you to receive His love and know that you are a special and unique person to Him. Will you receive God's love and affection? Won't you open up and enter into an intimate relationship with your true Father? He is patiently waiting for you to come. It is my prayer that you will realize His love for you and respond to the father heart of God.



John Dawson - A native of New Zealand, John Dawson and his wife, Julie operate out of several locations around the world. They have four children and four grandchildren. John is a well-loved leader in the international church who helps to give oversight to several key networks. Since September 2003, John has served as the International President with Youth With A Mission, giving direction to our seventeen thousand staff from over 200 nations working in nearly all the world's countries and territories.

In 1990, John founded the International Reconciliation Coalition; a network of Christian leaders dedicated to healing wounds between people groups and elements of society. Beginning with Native American and African American issues, the coalition has quickly become a global network, dealing with the wounds of many nations.

Along with his 400,000 copy best-seller *Taking Our Cities for God*, John has written a highly acclaimed book *Healing America's Wounds* followed by *Three Nations at the Crossroads*, dealing with the issue of national identity facing Germany, Switzerland and Austria. More recently, he has written *What Christians should know about Reconciliation*, a brief guide for the reconciliation movement. broadcast in several nations.